

Energy Safety Tips

Protect yourself and your family



information you need



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Failure to use utility services safely - especially natural gas and electricity - can be harmful or fatal. The Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCC) and Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission (IURC) encourage consumers to read the following tips carefully. Also, consult with your utility for additional tips and carefully read safety information that may be included in your bills.

Gas Leaks

Because natural gas is colorless and odorless in its natural form, utilities add a chemical to the gas so you can easily smell a leak. The chemical, mercaptan, smells like rotten eggs and is potent even at small amounts. If you smell this odor:

- Do not pick up the telephone or use a match or lighter (but do put out any open flames).
- Do not turn any lights on or off, and do not touch your thermostat or the controls on any other appliances.
- Leave the property immediately. Make sure everyone else evacuates, too.
- Once you are away from the property and can no longer smell the leak, call the utility or 911.
- Do not return to the property until the utility says it is safe.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) is odorless and colorless, and can quickly cause illness and even death. CO can be formed if natural gas, propane, kerosene, wood, charcoal and other fuels are not completely burned. These steps can help prevent CO poisoning:

- Install at least one carbon monoxide detector on each level of your home or business. Test it regularly.
- Have your heating and air conditioning systems, water heater and other appliances inspected and serviced regularly by a licensed professional. This will not only help the appliances operate safely, but will help them work at the most efficient levels possible (helping to reduce your energy bills).
- If your home has a chimney or fireplace, have it inspected regularly.
- Do not burn kerosene, charcoal or other fuels unless you are in a properly ventilated area. (Ventilation in garages is generally not good enough.)
- NEVER use an oven or stove to try to heat your home.
- If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, leave the property, go outdoors and call 911. Symptoms may include nausea, headaches, drowsiness, dizziness and confusion.

Portable Space Heaters

Space heaters can cause serious fire hazards and are a leading cause of injuries and deaths every winter. Consumers are strongly urged to follow these tips:

- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Keep space heaters away from furniture, draperies and rugs. Do not let children or pets go near space heaters.
- Do not plug an electric space heater into an extension cord.
- Kerosene heaters should only be used in well-ventilated areas.
- **Do not use space heaters when you are sleeping and never leave a space heater unattended.**

Electrical Outlets

- Check outlets for loose fitting plugs, which can overheat and cause a fire.
- Don't overload outlets.
- Replace missing or broken wall plates.
- Make sure all unused outlets have safety covers to protect children.

Appliance Cords

- Make sure cords are in good condition; do not use an appliance if the cord is frayed or cracked.
- Electric cords should never be warm.
- Grab the plug, not the cord, when removing it from an outlet.
- Never nail or staple a cord to a wall, baseboard or any other object.
- Do not place cords under carpets or rugs.
- Do not rest furniture on a cord.



Extension Cords

- Do not overload an extension cord, and do not plug more appliances into the cord than it can safely carry.
- Carefully read the warnings and safety information on an extension cord's packaging before using it. Follow the warnings carefully, including whether the cord is designed for indoor or outdoor use.
- Use extension cords only on a temporary basis. Fully uncoil an extension cord before using it.
- Use a heavy-duty, grounded, three-wire cord for power tools.
- Use cords that are approved by Underwriters Laboratories and carry the UL trademark.
- Grab the plug, not the cord, when removing it from an outlet.
- Make sure extension cords have safety closures to protect children.

Additional Indoor Safety Tips

- Keep flammable materials away from natural gas appliances, as well as toasters and ovens.
- Check the pilot lights on gas appliances periodically. The pilot light should be a steady blue flame. A steady yellow flame means the appliance is not working efficiently; it also means a safety hazard is likely present and should be checked by a professional immediately.
- Change the filters on your furnace and air conditioning units regularly. This will help the units work safely and efficiently (saving you money).
- Appliances should be unplugged when not being used.
- Don't place anything on top of a television. Appliances such as televisions need a free flow of air around them so they do not overheat and start a fire.
- Light bulbs can get very hot; keep anything that burns away from them.

Power Lines

- **Always assume that every power line is live.** If you touch a live electric line, you will be instantly killed or severely injured. Even if a downed line produces no sparks or humming noises, it may still be live.

- Stay at least 15 yards away from any downed power line.

Never touch a downed line - either with your hands or another object such as a board. Electric utility workers who repair outages must undergo extensive training and follow strict safety guidelines.

- If you see a downed power line, call 911 immediately!

- Electricity travels through water. If you see downed lines in a wet or marshy area, stay indoors and call 911.

- Do not touch a car or a tree that is contact with a power line. The current may travel through it.

- If you are in a car and a power line falls on it during a storm, stay inside the car until emergency responders arrive – if you can safely do so. If you must leave the vehicle, jump out so that you never touch both the ground and the car at the same time.

- Do not climb trees that have power lines running through them or near the limbs.

- Never fly a kite with a wet string, even in fair weather - and don't fly kites, model airplanes or balloons near overhead power lines.

- When cleaning gutters or working on the roof of your home or business, make sure that you keep ladders, tools and equipment at least 10 feet away from overhead power lines. Only work on the roof when someone else is home, or if you've notified a neighbor.



Gas Pipelines

Pipelines that transport natural gas, petroleum and other fuels must meet strict state and federal guidelines in order to ensure safe, reliable delivery. If you are near a pipeline and smell a rotten egg odor, move away until the odor is no longer detectable, then call 911.



Call Before You Dig

If you plan to do any digging on your property, state law requires that you call the Indiana Underground Plant Protection Service (IUPPS) at least two days in advance. The service is free and the toll-free number is 1-800-382-5544.